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RESEARCH PROJECT

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State: Montana

Project No. SE-1 Title: Statewide Endangered Species Research

Job. No. 3 Title: Black-footed Ferret (Mustela nigripes) Survey and Inventory

Period Covered: 1 September, 1983 - 1 September 1984

Prepared by: John P. Tack Approved by: Glenn Erickson
John D. Cada

Date: December 1, 1984

Since this is a Progress Report only, results presented herein are not necessarily final and may be subject to change. For this reason, the information contained in this report may not be published or used for other purposes without permission of the Director.

INTRODUCTION:

The black-footed ferret (Mustela nigripes) is classified as endangered by both state and federal law. Reasons for their decline appears to have been related to the severe reduction of the ferrets principle prey, the prairie dog (Cynomys ludovicianus and C. leucurus).

The black-footed ferret is generally considered as facing a very high risk of extinction relative to other endangered species. Discovery of a population in Wyoming (Clark et al. 1982) has given new hope that the species can be saved. Clark (personal communication) feels that recovery of the species can be attained if a second population of similar viability can be located. Achieved recovery level may even be sufficient to reclassify the black-footed ferret from endangered to threatened. This action would allow a more flexible management approach, perhaps including control of some prairie dogs within primary management zones, or transplanting ferrets away from high conflict areas. Location of a second population would also provide research opportunities previously unavailable, as well as providing an opportunity to develop a demonstration of land uses and landowner participation which is compatible with endangered species conservation.

Thus, there are two primary problems which need to be solved: a) existing ferret populations need to be located and defined; and b) management programs must be developed which will meet the needs of agricultural interests while preserving or enhancing ferret populations in Montana.

OBJECTIVES:

To establish good working relationships with landowners whose lands include black-footed ferret habitat; and, to identify, define, and develop management actions for at least one viable black-footed ferret population in Montana.

PROCEDURES:

The public relations phase of the project began with a series of meetings with representatives from livestock/agricultural interests, conservation organizations and affected government agencies. The purpose was to provide information relative to the proposed ferret study, to identify some of the likely benefits, and to solicit recommendations, support and cooperation.

Study areas were prioritized based upon known prairie dog distribution, previous ferret reports, and willingness of associated landowners to cooperate. Each study area was surveyed using modern survey techniques (Clark et al. 1984). Surveys were conducted once each during the summer and winter periods.

RESULTS:

Meetings

In addition to the initial meetings with representatives from various public and private organizations interested or affected by this study, public meetings were held in nine eastern communities to generate local interest in the project.

The meetings provided an opportunity for some individuals to air their frustrations with state and federal endangered species policies and regulations. However, by the end of the meetings most appeared to be satisfied that this study was needed and that benefits would result.

Some of the input received is summarized as follows:

1. Ranchers had few negative feelings toward the black-footed ferret,
2. Most ranchers were very concerned about the present expansion of prairie dog communities on public and private rangeland in Montana,
3. Nearly all those attending the meetings were receptive to having our field crews inventory their lands for ferrets,
4. Agriculture needs assurance that we can do what we promise regarding prairie dog management, and
5. Receptiveness to maintaining ferrets and prairie dog populations on rangeland varied greatly among ranchers. Some wanted all prairie dogs removed whereas several indicated interest in maintaining some levels of prairie dogs and ferrets.

Field Searches

Following the public meetings in December, two areas, one east of the town of Ekalaka and the other south of the town of Malta, were selected as priority areas for field searches the first year of the study.

Field searches were initiated in January and continued periodically through September 1984. The only positive evidence of possible ferret presence was discovery of portions of two ferret skulls at the Ekalaka study area. The age of the skulls could not be determined although they were located in a portion of the prairie dog community which had been in existence only for the last four years.

In addition to working on the two priority areas, several ferret reports were followed up by various agency cooperators with no positive findings.

Agency Cooperation

Agencies cooperating in ferret work in Montana included the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Montana Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs and MDFWP. In addition to sharing work assignments, a three part ferret reporting procedure was developed (Appendix I). The initial procedure channels ferret reports to the MDFWP as quickly as possible. Secondly, a rating procedure is used to assess the potential validity of the report. Thirdly, a course of action is selected based upon the validity rating. A standardized reporting form was developed (Appendix II) to maintain a permanent data base on all ferret reports from Montana.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Although a publicity campaign has been planned, only a portion of it has been implemented to date. Public service announcement will be used in the near future.

It is recommended that in 1984-85 field efforts be continued at about the same intensity as during this past year. However, some change may need to occur with regard to the study area priorities based upon new information about prairie dog distribution.

After the 1984-85 field season, project direction should be re-evaluated based upon the findings of the first two years. However, the intensity of the project should not diminish due to redirected emphasis. For example, more effort may have to be diverted into public information and working with the agricultural communities preparing for reintroductions.

LITERATURE CITED

Clark, T.W., Campbell, T.M., Schroeder, M.H., and L. Richardson. 1984. Handbook of methods for locating black-footed ferrets. Wyoming BLM Wildlife Technical Bulletin. No. 1. 55 pp.

APPENDIX I

PROCEDURE TO FOLLOW UP FERRET REPORTS AND/OR VERIFIED SIGHTINGS

The purpose of this procedure is to establish a formal chain of events so that each party's responsibility is well defined, resulting in a speedy and smooth course of action.

1. The MDFWP will act as a central clearing house for all ferret reports/sightings and will initiate the response procedure when ferret report/sightings have been made.
2. All ferret report/sightings should be transferred to the MDFWP research office in Bozeman within eight hours of receipt. Reports should be given to the following people in order of priority:

Name	Office Number	Home Number
John Cada	994-6363	587-0597
Dennis Flath	994-6354	587-0866
Margaret Morelli	994-3285	586-5559

During non office hours, these individuals should be contacted at their residences.

3. To expedite transfer of report information within each agency, it is recommended that the first individual obtaining the information contact the MDFWP directly.
4. Information to obtain and report should include as a minimum the following:
 - a. Name, address and telephone number of the observer (and person reporting);
 - b. Complete description of location of observation as well as geographical location (township, range, section);
 - c. Date and time of observation;
 - d. Number of animals observed;
 - e. Distance of animal(s) observed in feet;
 - f. Length of time observed;
 - g. Activity of animal(s);
 - h. Proximity of nearest prairie dog community;
 - i. Circumstances of observation.
5. One or more of the following individuals will evaluate

the validity of the report: Dennis Flath, John Cada, - Pon Crete, Wayne Brewster, Tim Clark and Tom Campbell. The report will be scored based on the following criteria:

- a. Observer reliability. High = 10 pts., Moderate = 5 pts., and unknown or questionable = 0 pts.;
- b. Location. On prairie dog town or other prairie dog towns within 5 mi. = 10 pts., On or near prairie dog town and few other towns within 5 mi. = 5 pts., No prairie dog towns in vicinity = 0 pts.;
- c. Distance of observation. Within 50 yards or 200 yards through 4+ power telescope = 10 pts., Within 50-100 yds or 200 to 400 yds through 4+ power scope = 5 pts., Over 100 yds or 400+ yds. through 4+ power scope = 0 pts.;
- d. Length of time observed. 5 or more min. = 10 pts., 30 seconds to 5 min. = 5 pts., Less than 30 seconds = 0 pts.;
- e. Description of animal. Mask = 2 pts., Size = 2 pts., Tail length of color = 2 pts., Body color = 2 pts., and Leg color = 2 pts.

The following categories would be determined based upon the above scoring system:

- a. High probable. 40-50 pts. with no zeros on any item.
Action: Follow up recommended without delay;
- b. Likely. 30-40 pts. with no zeros or 40-50 pts with one zero.
Action: Follow up within two days;
- c. Fair. 22-30 pts. with no zeros or 40-50 pts. with one zero.
Action: Follow up if convenient or if other reports have come from same vicinity.
- d. Unlikely. All other point categories.
Action: No action recommended.

7. If a follow up is planned, the USFWS, MDFWP, and RIOTA will be notified immediately and a decision made as to which of the agencies should begin the follow up procedure. If no follow up is planned, the information will be forwarded to the above parties by mail.

8. A follow up search in response to a report will be as follows:

- a. One to three (maximum) of the involved researchers will contact private landowners in the vicinity of the search and inform them of our desire to follow up and solicit their support;
- b. Up to four field biologists will begin prearranged surveys;
- c. The length of time spent in the area surveying will be dependent upon the judgment of the field researchers.

9. When a ferret sighting has been made, immediate confidentiality will be maintained and the following action will be taken:

- a. The USFWS will be notified, consulted, and impending procedure will be agreed upon;
- b. The landowner/leasee or public agency landowner will be contacted by MDFWP within 48 hours, if possible, to work out details of the follow up effort;
- c. A low-key assessment of the black-footed ferret population will be conducted by a minimum number of field biologists and will continue for approximately 90 days;
- d. After four to six days the cooperating agencies will be notified of the preliminary status of the sighting;
- e. Public meetings and news releases will be coordinated by the MDFWP in cooperation with MDA within 14 to 21 days after verification had been made;
- f. If a population of ferrets is found, meetings with affected landowners and cooperating agencies will be held to develop an interim management plan for each land ownership; and
- g. After 120 to 180 days a general plan with action goals for black-footed ferret conservation and recovery will be developed.

APPENDIX II

FERRET OBSERVATION REPORT FORM

DATE REPORT RECEIVED: Mo>__ Da>__ Yr>__

REPORTED BY:

First Name>_____ Last Name>_____
Address>_____
City>_____ St>__ Zip>____ Phone>_____

OBSERVED BY:

First Name>_____ Last Name>_____
Address>_____
City>_____ St>__ Zip>____ Phone>_____

LOCATION OF SIGHTING:

Range>__ Township>__ Section>__
UTM Zone> __ Lat>____ Long>____

DATE OF OBSERVATION: Mo>__ Da>__ Yr>__ TIME OF DAY (MILITARY) ____
NUMBER OF ANIMALS OBSERVED>__ TELESCOPE USED (1=YES,2=NO) _ POWER?>__

DISTANCE (In Yards) TO ANIMAL(S)>__

LENGTH OF TIME (In Minutes) OBSERVED>__

ACTIVITY OF ANIMAL(S)>_____

DESCRIPTION>_____

PROXIMITY OF NEAREST PRAIRIE DOG COMMUNITY (1=on or within 1/4mi,
2=between 1/2 & 5mi, 3=none within 5mi.)>__

CIRCUMSTANCE OF OBSERVATION _____

RELIABILITY OF OBSERVER>_____

RELIABILITY RATING (1=very good, 2=good, 3=questionable)> __
COMMENTS>_____

OBSERVATION NUMBER>0000

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RESEARCH PROJECT

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State: Montana

Project No. SE-1 Title: Statewide Endangered Species Research

Job. No. 3 Title: Black-footed Ferret (Mustela nigripes) Survey and Inventory

Period Covered: 1 September, 1984- 1 September 1985

Prepared by: John D. Cada Approved by: Glenn Erickson
John D. Cada

Date: January 15, 1986

Since this is a Progress Report only, results presented herein are not necessarily final and may be subject to change. For this reason, the information contained in this report may not be published or used for other purposes without permission of the Director.

1997-2001

INTRODUCTION:

The black-footed ferret (Mustela nigripes) is classified as endangered by both state and federal law. Reasons for their decline appears to have been related to the severe reduction of the ferrets principle prey, the prairie dog (Cynomys ludovicianus and C. leucurus).

The black-footed ferret is generally considered as facing a very high risk of extinction relative to other endangered species. Discovery of a population in Wyoming had given new hope that the species could be saved. Recent plague break out in the prairie dog colonies associated with canine distemper in the ferrets has reduced the possibility of recovering the species.

During this reporting period, efforts were directed toward solving two primary problems: a) locate and define existing ferret populations; and b) develop management programs which will meet the needs of agricultural interests while preserving or enhancing ferret populations in Montana.

OBJECTIVES:

To establish good working relationships with landowners whose lands include black-footed ferret habitat, and to identify, define, and develop management actions for at least one viable black-footed ferret population in Montana.

PROCEDURES:

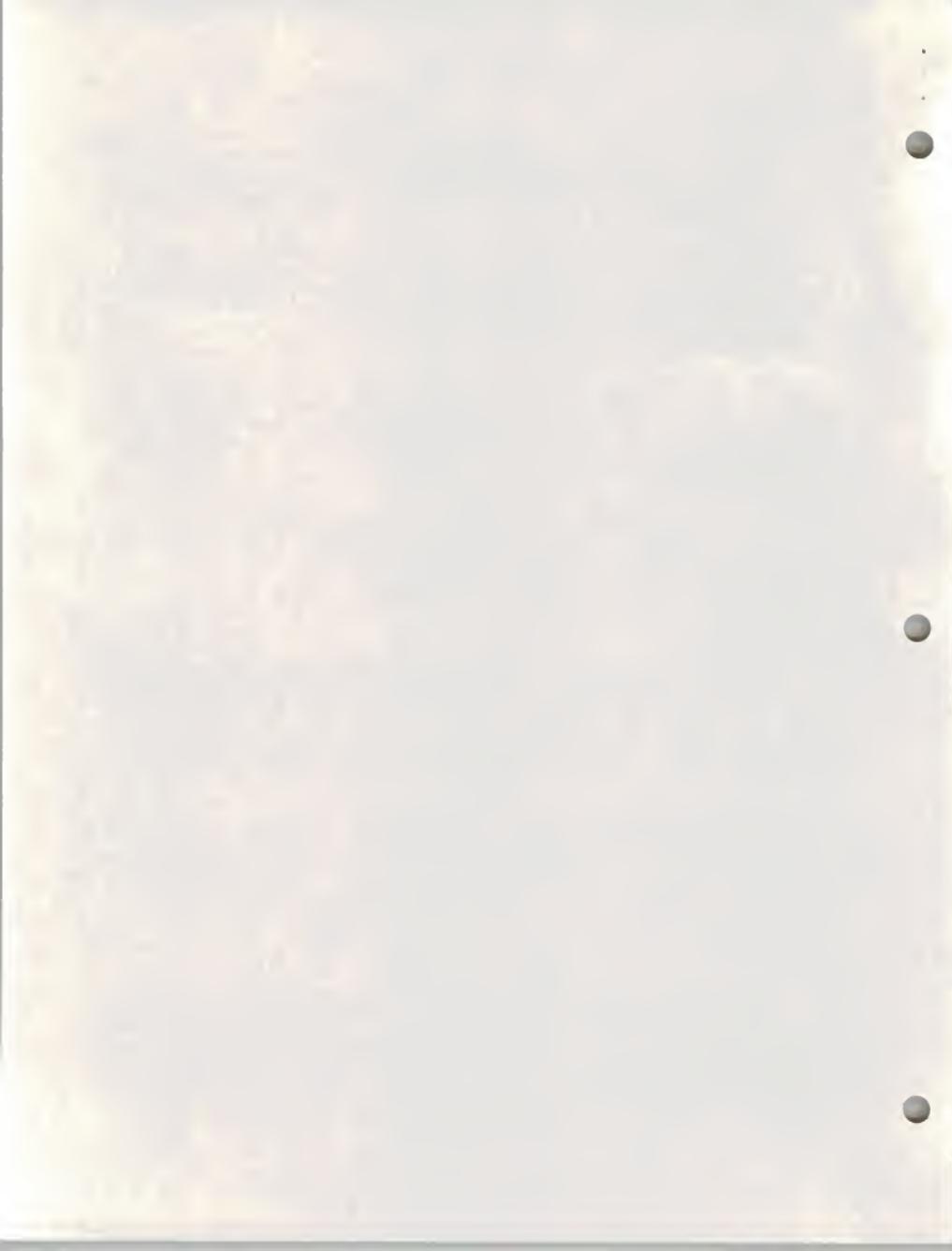
The public relations phase of the project was continued by conducting meetings with representatives from livestock/agricultural interests, conservation organizations and affected government agencies. The purpose was to provide information relative to the proposed ferret study, to identify some of the likely benefits, and to solicit recommendations, support and cooperation.

Study areas were prioritized based upon known prairie dog distribution, previous ferret reports, and willingness of associated landowners to cooperate. Each study area was surveyed using modern survey techniques (Clark et al. 1984). Surveys were conducted once each during the summer and winter periods.

RESULTS:

Public Meetings

Two public meetings were held in July, 1985, to summarize the findings of ferret recovery efforts in Montana and to discuss plans for the future. The first meeting was with the leaders and representatives of agricultural interests. Attendance was low suggesting lessened concern or interest in the ferret recovery program. This was taken as a good sign in that during the previous two years of the study apparently no red flags have been raised.



The second meeting was held in a rural community hall south of Malta, Montana, to make it convenient for rural people from a potential recovery area to attend and offer input. Thirty-three locals attended and vented considerable frustration with various government program, but in the end did agree to cooperate in developing management actions relating to ferret recovery. Some of the major concerns expressed were as follows:

1. Would funding be guaranteed to support necessary and agreed upon management actions?
2. If agreement was reached on a specific number of prairie dog acres, will some government agency agree to control the rest on federal land?
3. Will there be reliable follow through on management plans?
4. Should there be a recreational user fee to provide funds for water, prairie dog control, etc.?
5. How many prairie dogs should there be in Montana?
6. The maximum allowable prairie dog acreage should be 1% of public land in a particular allotment.
7. Should there be compensation for prairie dog occurrence?
8. We need to say "no" to Sierra Club, Audubon, and environmental groups.
9. We need to keep people informed via mailing lists, newspaper articles, etc.
10. We need assurance that prairie dogs will be controlled.
11. Compensation for maintaining prairie dogs should include range improvements, financial, etc. through negotiation.
12. UL Bend should be a location for ferrets and prairie dogs.

Although not all the issues or questions were solved or even addressed, it was apparent that most of the people in attendance were willing to work with the agencies and proceed in a direction compatible with the needs of ferret recovery while considering the needs of agriculture.

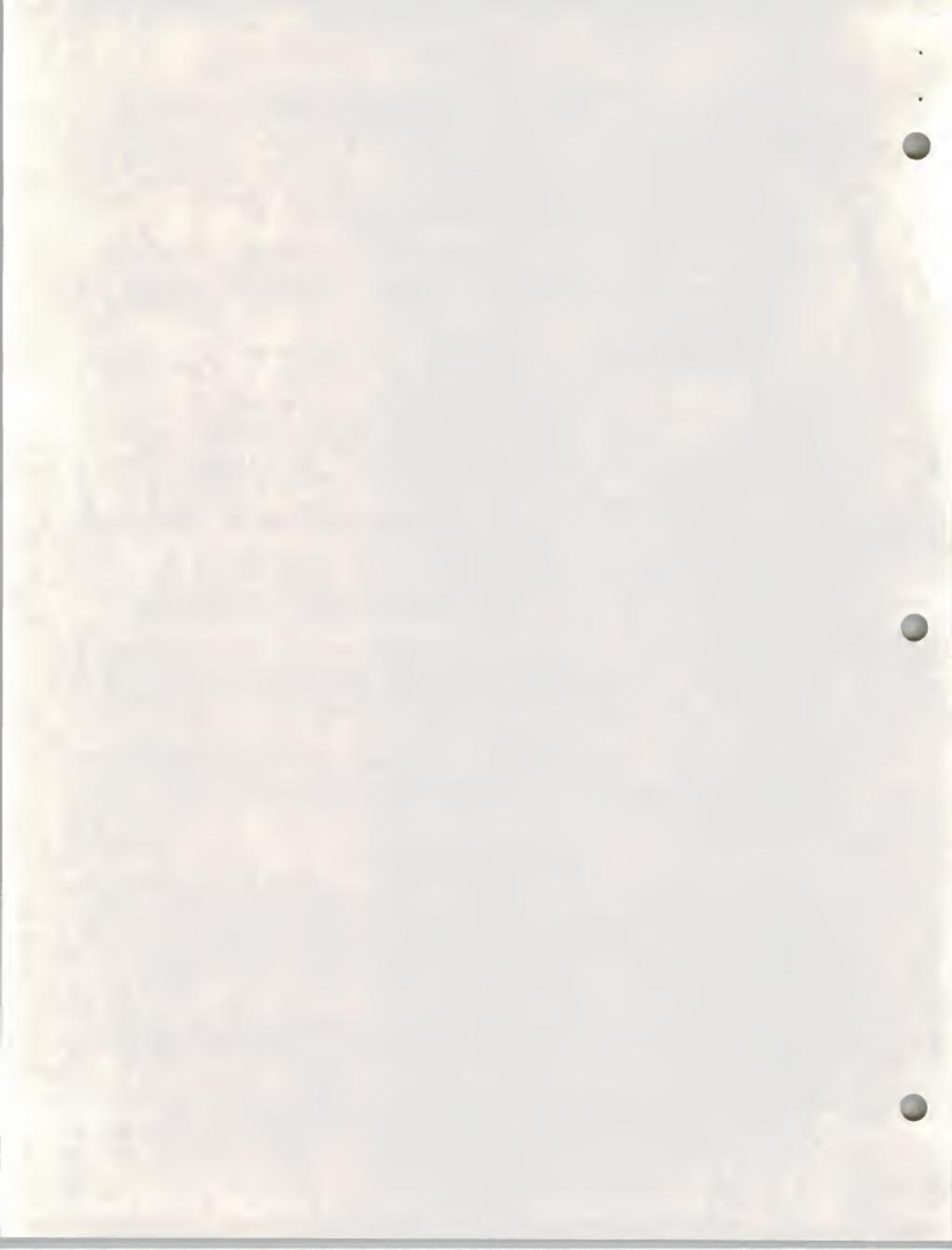
Two additional meetings were scheduled for October and November to address the same issues with the leaders of the conservation community, statewide, and with members of rural communities near Miles City.

Agency Cooperation

From the onset of this project, cooperation among interested and involved governmental agencies has been very good. Agencies actively cooperating with ferret recovery include: Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Montana Department of Agriculture.

Two interagency meetings were held to coordinate field activities, establish recovery priorities, and assign recovery tasks.

An interstate ferret working group with representatives from Montana, Wyoming, Utah, South Dakota and the Denver Fish and Wildlife Service office was established following a meeting of the participants in May. The purpose the this group is to



coordinate activities among states, prioritize recovery sites, and standardize techniques.

Field Surveys

During January, 7,300 acres on 48 prairie dog colonies were surveyed for ferret activity in South Central Montana. Approximately 40 local ranchers and agency people were visited within the same area to help identify prairie dog locations and to obtain information concerning past prairie dog eradication programs.

In February, 4,000+ acres on prairie dog colonies were surveyed for ferrets in South Central and Eastern Montana. During April and May prairie dog towns were located on the Crow Indian Reservation and some were surveyed lightly for ferrets. A ferret report was followed up in the vicinity of Ekalaka.

No evidence of current ferret activity was obtained as a result of any of the field work.

Habitat Evaluations

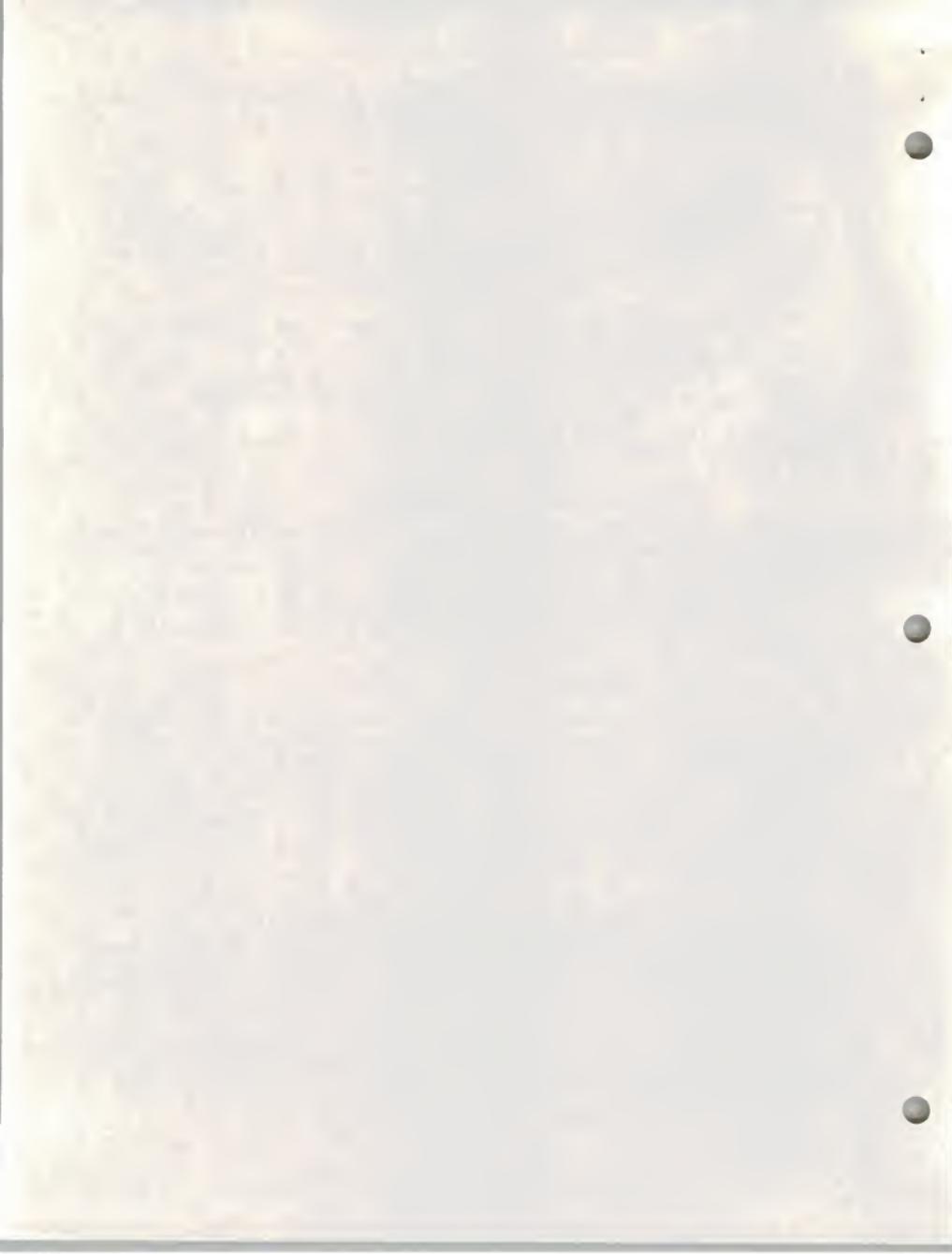
Using the Habitat Suitability Index developed by Houston et al. (1985), three prairie dog complexes were tested as to their ferret habitat potential and compared to the ferret habitat at Meteetsee, Wyoming. Although the information was preliminary, it was apparent that the habitat in the tested areas was suitable to support a ferret population. A report of this analysis is in preparation (Clark and Grensten, 1986).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

This report concludes an initial two-year effort to search for ferrets in Montana. Prairie dog complexes were located and prioritized for ferret surveys. Ferret surveys were conducted during summer and winter periods by the Department and cooperating agencies. No evidence of ferret activity was obtained. Had the wild ferret population in Wyoming remained viable, the direction of Montana's effort would have changed to place emphasis upon preparations for reestablishment by reintroductions from Wyoming.

Since the known Wyoming population appears to consist only of six captive ferrets, it is recommended that Montana continue to search for ferrets. Even though the likelihood of finding any ferrets in Montana is extremely small, it is our opinion that the need to add another ferret to the captive population is so great that it is the most important to continue searching for ferrets.

Further, it is recommended that preparations for reintroductions continue to ensure preservation of viable habitat should the captive population survive and produce enough offspring for reestablishment in the wild.

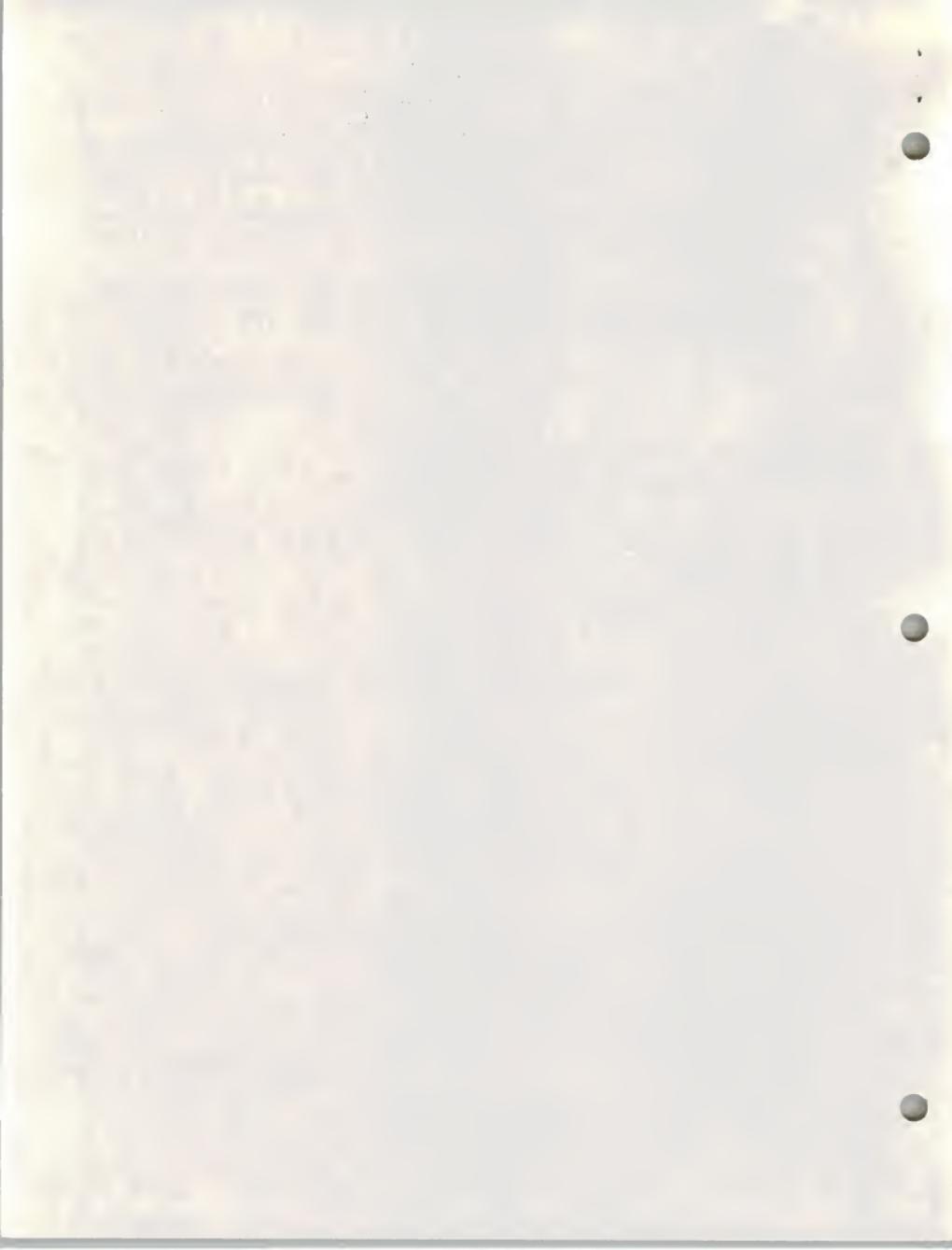


LITERATURE CITED:

Clark, T.W., Campbell, T.M., Schroeder, M.H., and L. Richardson. 1984. Handbook of methods for locating black-footed ferrets. Wyoming BLM Wildlife Technical Bulletin No. 1.55.

Clark, T.W., and J.J. Grensten. 1986. A preliminary analysis of black-footed ferret translocation sites in northcentral Montana. In preparation.

Houston, B.R., T.W. Clark, and S.C. Minta. 1985. A habitat suitability index for the black-footed ferret: a method to locate transplant sites. Great Basin Nat. Mem. In press.



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State: Montana

Project No. SE-1 Title: Statewide Endangered Species Research

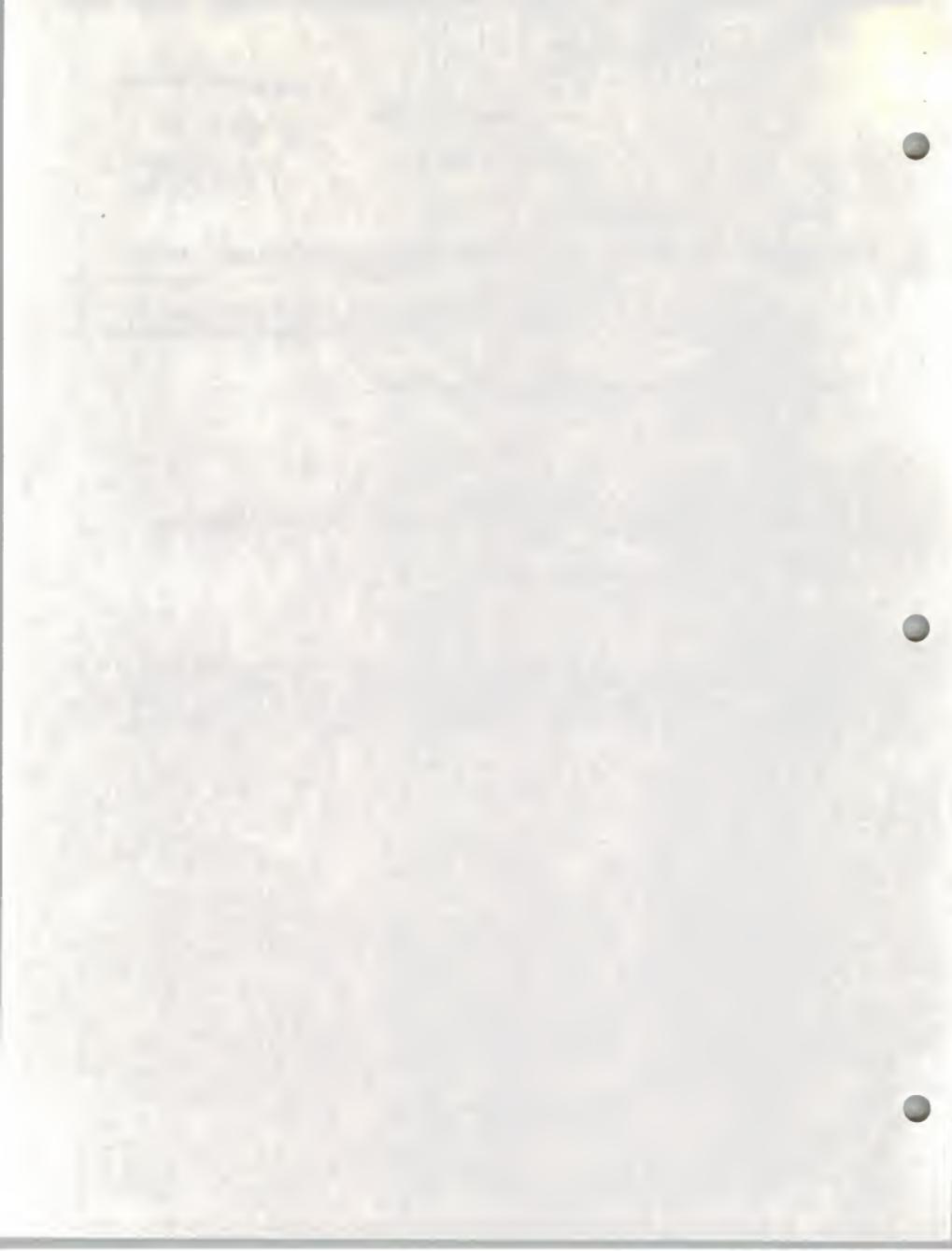
Job. No. 3 Title: Black-footed Ferret (Mustela nigripes) Survey and Inventory

Period Covered: 1 September, 1985-30 June 1986

Prepared by: Arnold R. Dood Approved by: Glenn Erickson
Arnold R. Dood

Date: September 30, 1986

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INTRODUCTION

The black-footed ferret (*Mustela nigripes*) is classified as endangered by both state and federal law. Reasons for their decline appears to have been related to the severe reduction of the ferrets principle prey, the prairie dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus* and *C. leucurus*).

The black-footed ferret is generally considered as facing a very high risk of extinction relative to other endangered species. Discovery of a population in Wyoming had given new hope that the species could be saved. In 1985 an epidemic of plague in the prairie dog colonies in Wyoming associated with canine distemper in the ferrets has reduced the possibility of recovering the species.

During this reporting period, efforts were directed toward solving two primary problems: a) locate and define existing ferret populations; and b) develop management programs which will meet the needs of agricultural interests while preserving or enhancing ferret populations and their potential habitats in Montana.

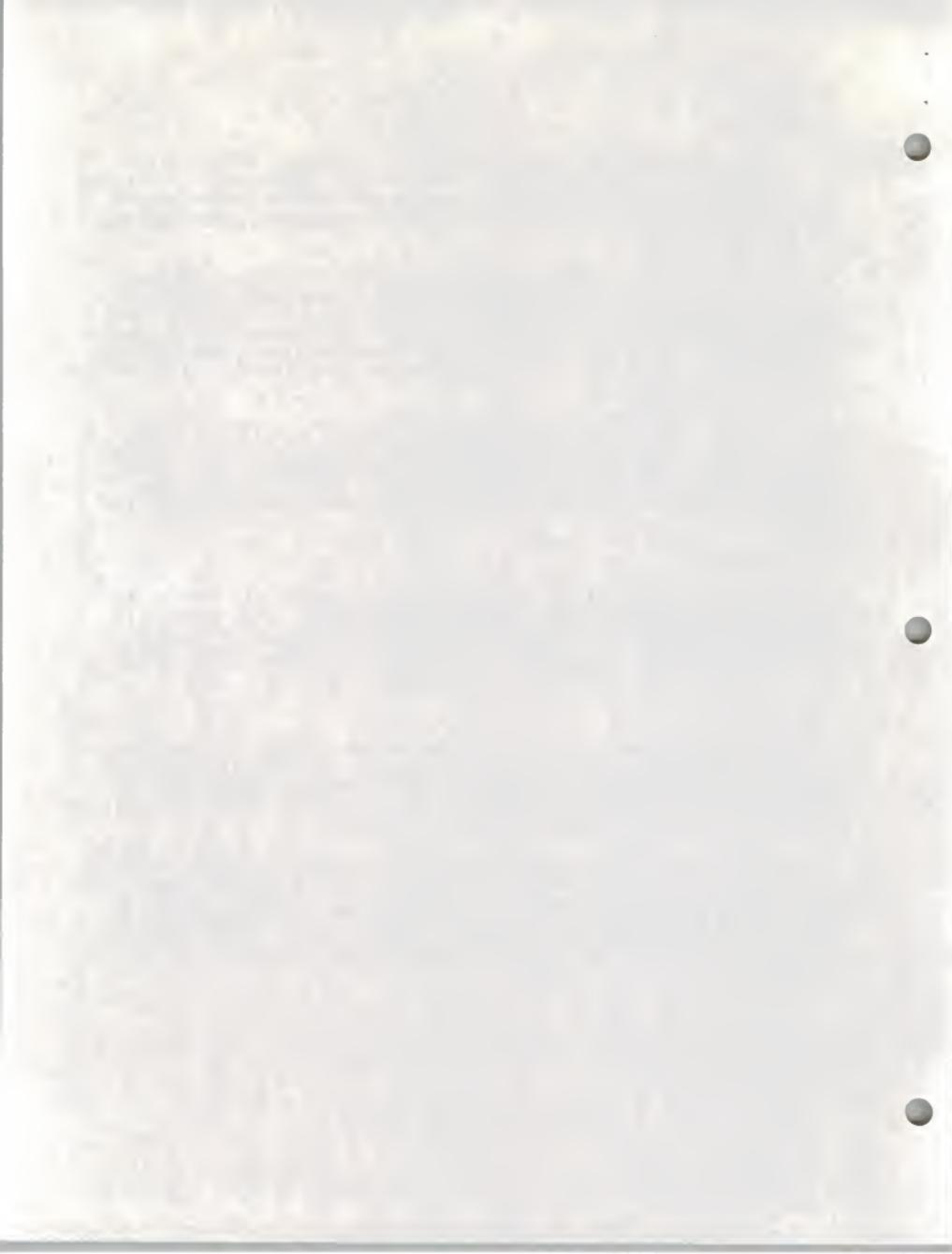
OBJECTIVES:

To locate any black-footed ferrets which may occur in Montana and establish good working relationships with landowners whose lands include black-footed ferret habitat, and to identify, define, and develop management actions for at least one viable black-footed ferret population in Montana.

PROCEDURES:

Study areas were prioritized based upon known prairie dog distribution, previous ferret reports, and willingness of associated landowners to cooperate. Each study area was surveyed using modern survey techniques (Clark et al. 1984). Surveys were conducted during the summer and winter periods.

The public relations phase of the project was continued by conducting meetings with representatives from livestock-agricultural interests, conservation organizations and affected government agencies. The purpose was to provide information relative to the ferret study, to identify some of the likely benefits, and to solicit recommendations, support and cooperation.



RESULTS:

Field Surveys

During January, 4,000 acres on 38 prairie dog colonies were surveyed for ferret activity in North Central Montana. Local ranchers and agency people were visited within the same area to help identify prairie dog locations and to obtain information concerning past prairie dog eradication programs.

In February and March, 2,000+ acres on 12 prairie dog colonies were surveyed for ferrets in North Central and Eastern Montana. In addition several ferret reports were followed up on at various locations in Eastern Montana.

No evidence of current ferret activity was obtained as a result of any of the field work.

Habitat Evaluations

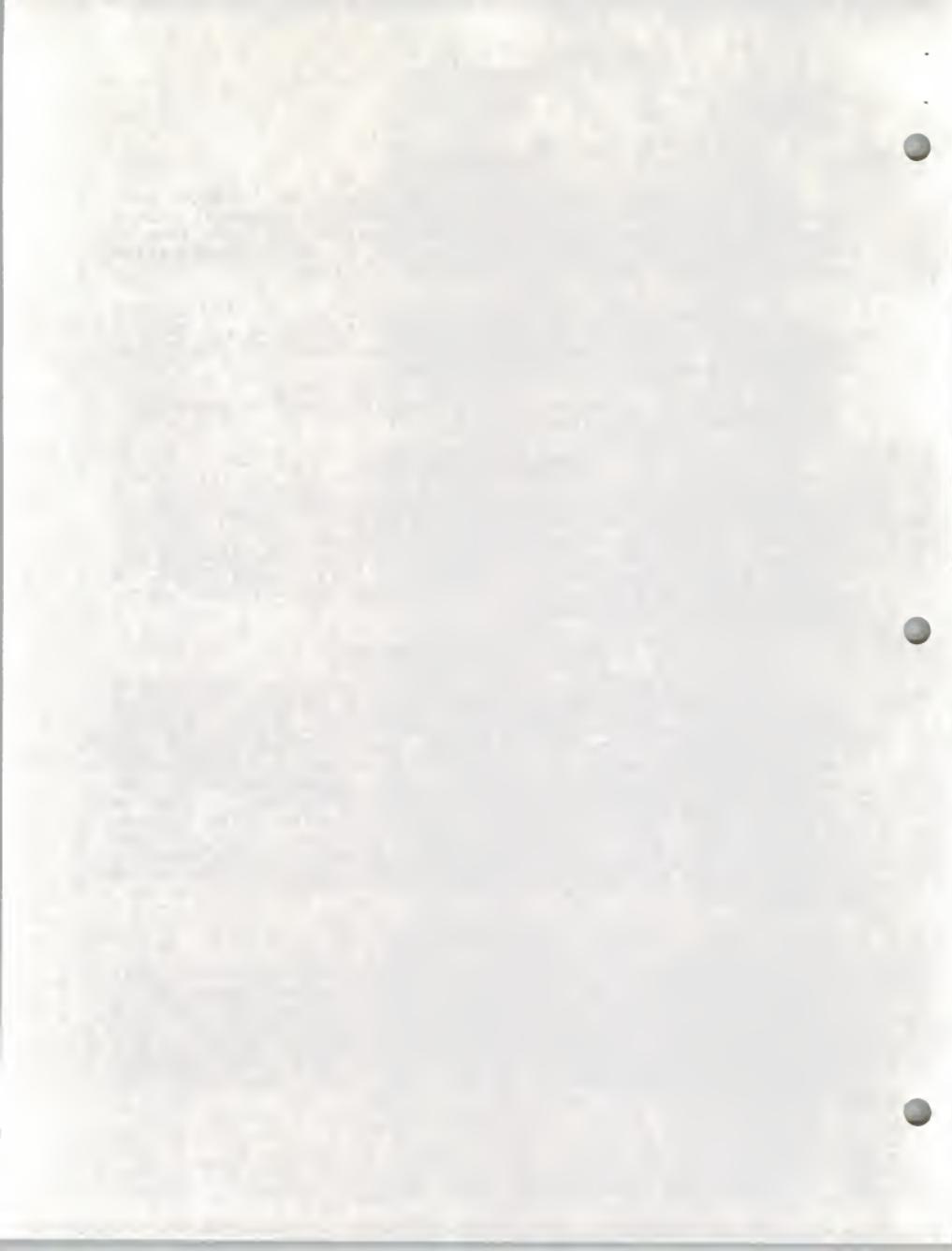
Using the Habitat Suitability Index developed by Houston et al.(1985) prairie dog complexes were tested as to their ferret habitat potential and compared to the ferret habitat at Meteetsee, Wyoming. It was apparent that the habitat in the tested areas was suitable to support a ferret population. A final report of this analysis is now available (Clark et al. 1986) and a copy is attached.

Reports and News Releases

Work was initiated on several reports and projects. Primary among these were an effort to use decision analysis to assist with decision making for the ferret program and use of a minimum viable population model to assist in defining populations necessary for recovery in Montana and concurrently habitat areas which will need to be maintained. Along these lines effort was expended helping collate information on prairie dogs so that it would be readily available to land managers to assist them in maintaining ferret habitat. Work was begun on a video demonstrating ferret search techniques and several news releases were prepared and distributed outlining progress on the ferret program.

Reward Program

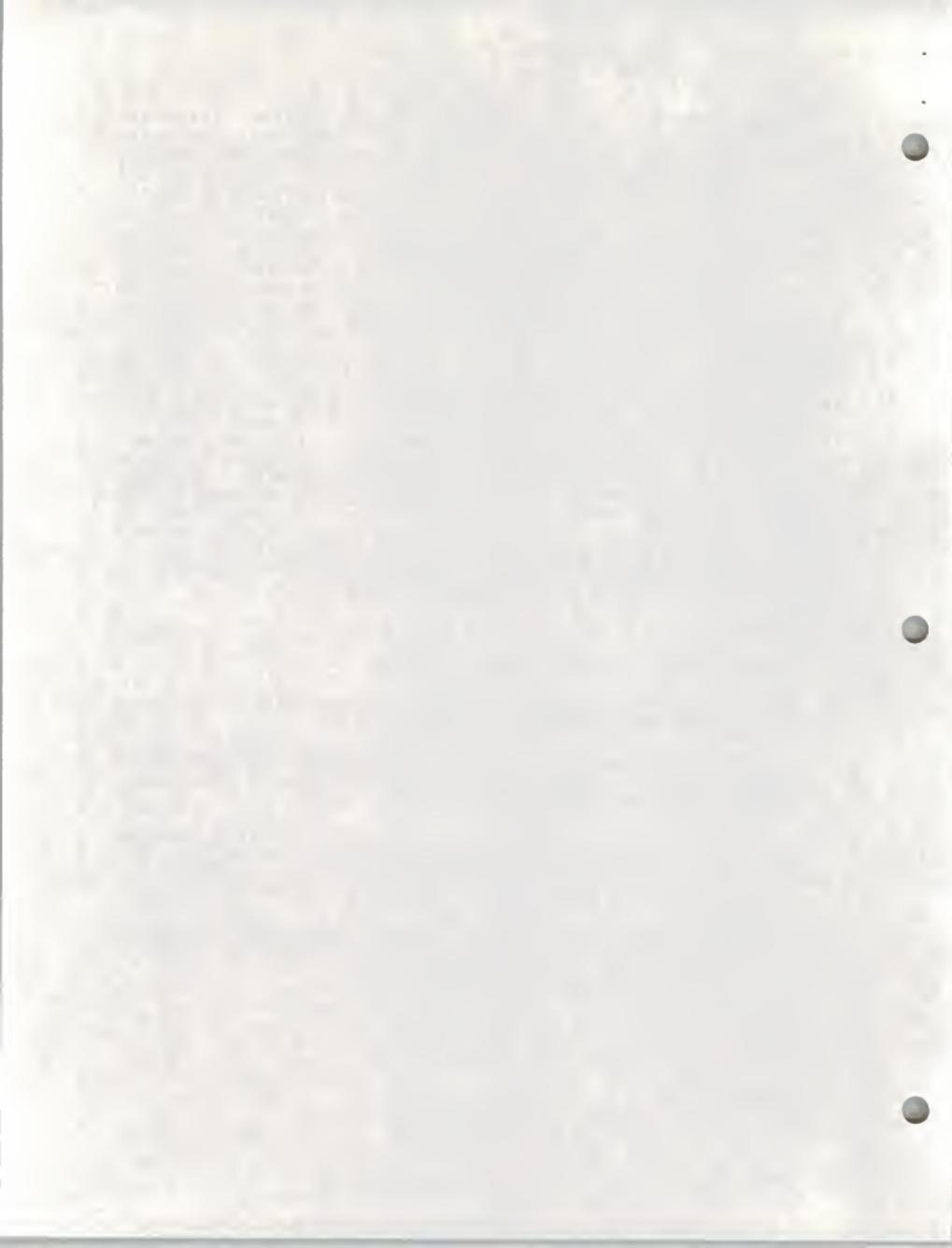
In an effort to obtain additional reports of possible ferrets in Montana the Department initiated a reward program. A reward of \$5000.00 will be paid to anyone who provides a photograph or information which results in the verification of one or more live black-footed ferrets in Montana. Money for the reward has been provided by Wildlife Conservation International, a division of New York Zoological Society. There are many



reasons why we proceeded with the reward program. There are currently 17 ferrets alive in captivity. The six in captivity during the breeding season in 1985 were unsuccessful at breeding this past spring because some of the individuals were juvenile animals. Also, because of the low numbers of individuals and the possibility that they are related, the genetic viability of the species is in question. Groups working on these problems have identified locating additional ferrets a top priority. Because live ferrets were located in Montana in the late 1970's, and even though recent surveys have failed to locate any ferrets in Montana, we feel the potential of ferrets in our state does exist. Due to the importance of locating additional ferrets during the next two years, coupled with our manpower and budget limitations, it is our opinion that the reward program will be an effective tool in providing more and better ferret reports. We feel that by following up on good reports of ferrets generated through the reward incentive, we will be able to concentrate our limited manpower and budget on those areas with the greatest likelihood of having ferrets. This reward program offers a positive incentive to the public for assisting us in our effort to recover this species. The sooner additional ferrets can be located, the sooner we can meet our legal responsibility to recover this species. In order for the program to run smoothly and be effective a variety of conditions have been placed on the reward and recommendations are made for people interested in participating. Details of these are as follows:

CONDITIONS:

1. The evidence must be obtained legally.
2. Permission to trespass on private lands must have been granted by the landowner or his agent.
3. When the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks follows up on a report, the person who made the report must assist with the verification.
4. The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks reserves the right to follow up only those reports which, by their criteria, provide the best details and substantive documentation of black-footed ferret occurrence in Montana.
5. The black-footed ferret is protected by both state and federal laws and must not be harassed, trapped, or killed.
6. This reward offer expires October 1, 1988.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Do not attempt to catch, detain, or harass a black-footed ferret. Such activities violate both state and federal laws.
2. Take a photograph, if possible. All reports will be systematically evaluated, and only those ranked relatively high will be followed up.
3. Make your report immediately.
4. Handouts on survey and identification techniques are available from any of the seven Department regional headquarters and at most Bureau of Land Management offices. A black-footed ferret survey training video is also available at the same locations.

And finally to insure that reports are treated equitably a scoring system has been developed which provides for consistent evaluation and follow up of reports. A copy of this system is attached.

Public Meetings

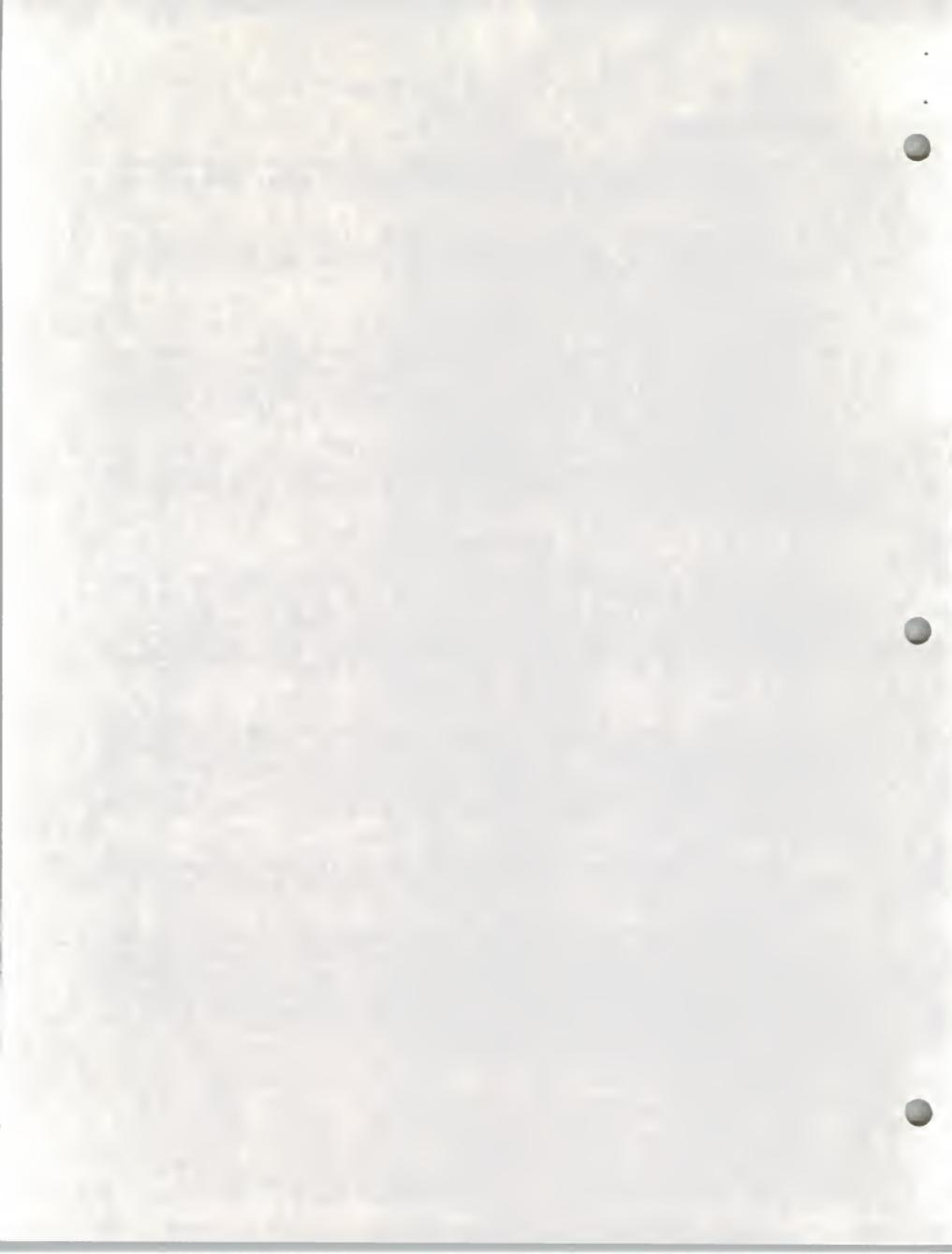
A meeting was held in November, 1985, with leaders of the conservation community to summarize the findings of ferret recovery efforts in Montana and to discuss plans for the future. In addition a workshop on locating black-footed ferrets was conducted at the annual meeting of the Montana Audubon Society.

Agency Cooperation

From the onset of this project, cooperation among interested and involved governmental agencies has been very good. Agencies actively cooperating with ferret recovery include: Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Montana Department of Agriculture.

Two interagency meetings were held to coordinate field activities, establish recovery priorities, and assign recovery tasks.

An interstate ferret working group with representatives from Montana, Wyoming, Utah, South Dakota and the Denver Fish and Wildlife Service office was established in 1985. The purpose of this group is to coordinate activities among states, prioritize recovery sites, and standardize techniques. However, to date, no follow up meetings have been scheduled.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Initially we made a two-year effort to search for ferrets in Montana. Prairie dog complexes were located and prioritized for ferret surveys. Ferret surveys were conducted during summer and winter periods by the Department and cooperating agencies. No evidence of ferret activity was obtained. Had the wild ferret population in Wyoming remained viable, the direction of Montana's effort would have changed to place emphasis upon preparations for reestablishment by reintroductions from Wyoming.

Since the Wyoming population appears to consist only of seventeen captive ferrets (with possibly a few in the wild), it is recommended that Montana continue to search for ferrets. Even though the likelihood of finding any ferrets in Montana is small, it is our opinion that the need to add another ferret to the captive population is so great that it is most important to continue searching for ferrets.

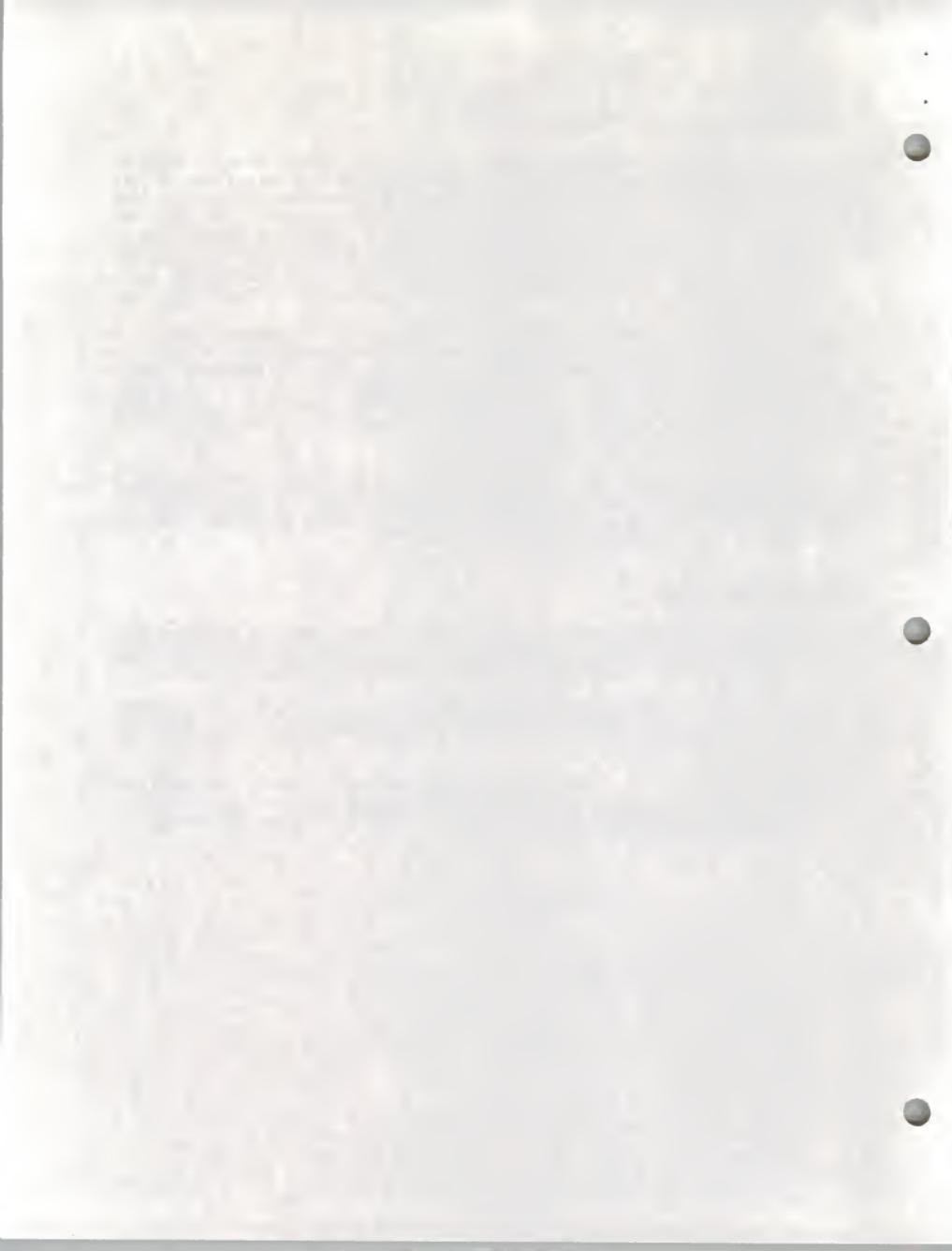
Further, it is recommended that preparations for reintroductions continue to ensure preservation of viable habitat should the captive population survive and produce enough offspring for reestablishment in the wild.

LITERATURE CITED:

Clark, T.W., Campbell, T.M., Schroeder, M.H., and L. Richardson. 1984. Handbook of methods for locating black-footed ferrets. Wyoming BLM Wildlife Technical Bulletin No. 1.55.

Clark, T.W., J. Grensten, M. Gorges, R. Crete and J. Gill. 1986. Analysis of Black-footed Ferret Translocation Sites in Montana. 43 pp.

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PROCEDURE TO FOLLOW UP FERRET REPORTS AND/OR VERIFIED SIGHTINGS

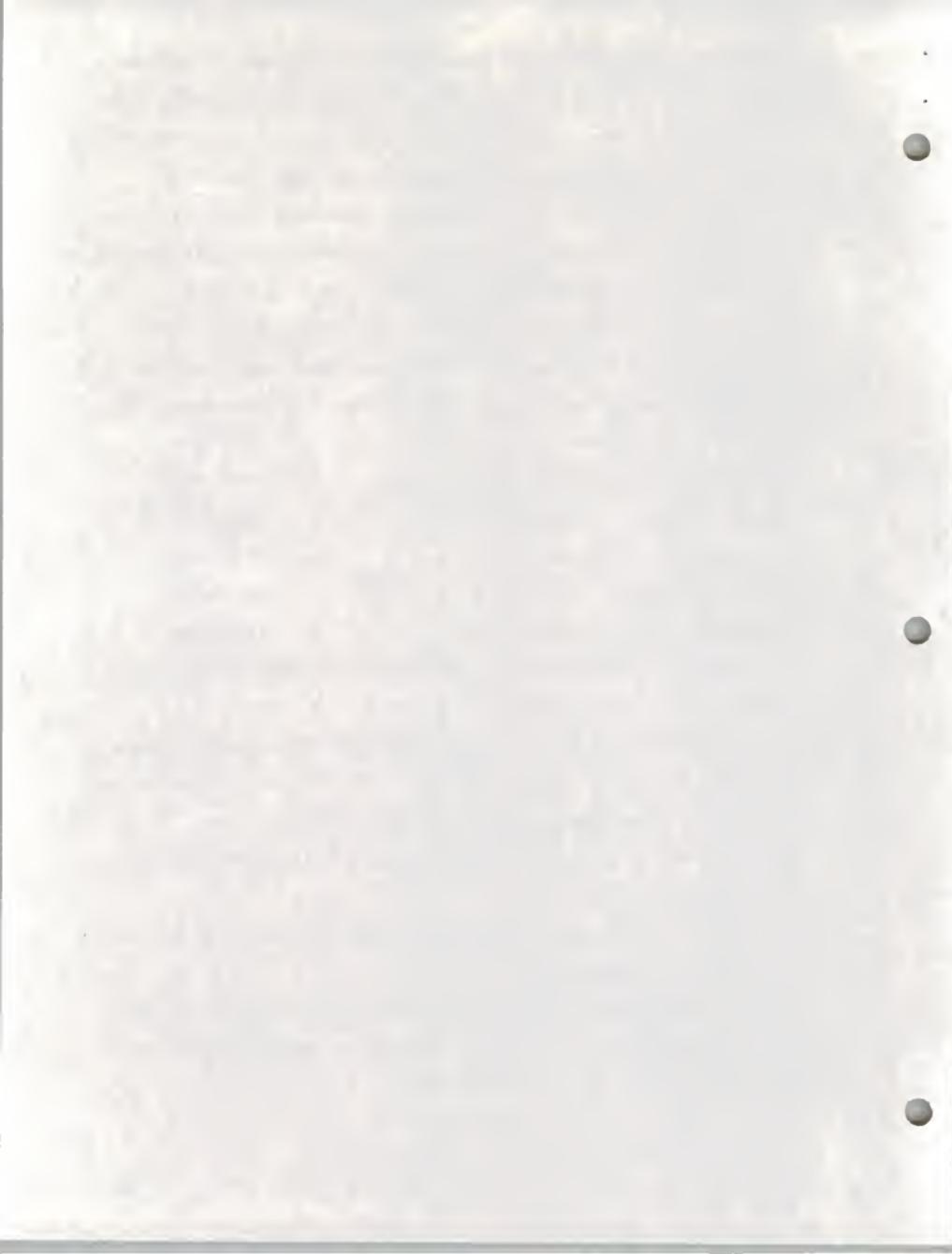
The purpose of this procedure is to establish a formal chain of events so that each party's responsibility is well defined, resulting in a speedy and smooth course of action.

1. The MDFWP will act as a central clearing house for all ferret reports/sightings and will initiate the response procedure when ferret report/sightings have been made.
2. All ferret reports/sightings should be transferred to the MDFWP research office in Bozeman within eight hours of receipt. Reports should be given to the following people in order of priority:

Name	Office Number	Home Number
Arnold Dood	994-6433	586-7237
John Cada	994-6363	587-0597
Dennis Flath	994-6354	587-0866
Margaret Morelli	994-3285	586-5559

During non office hours, these individuals should be contacted at their residences.

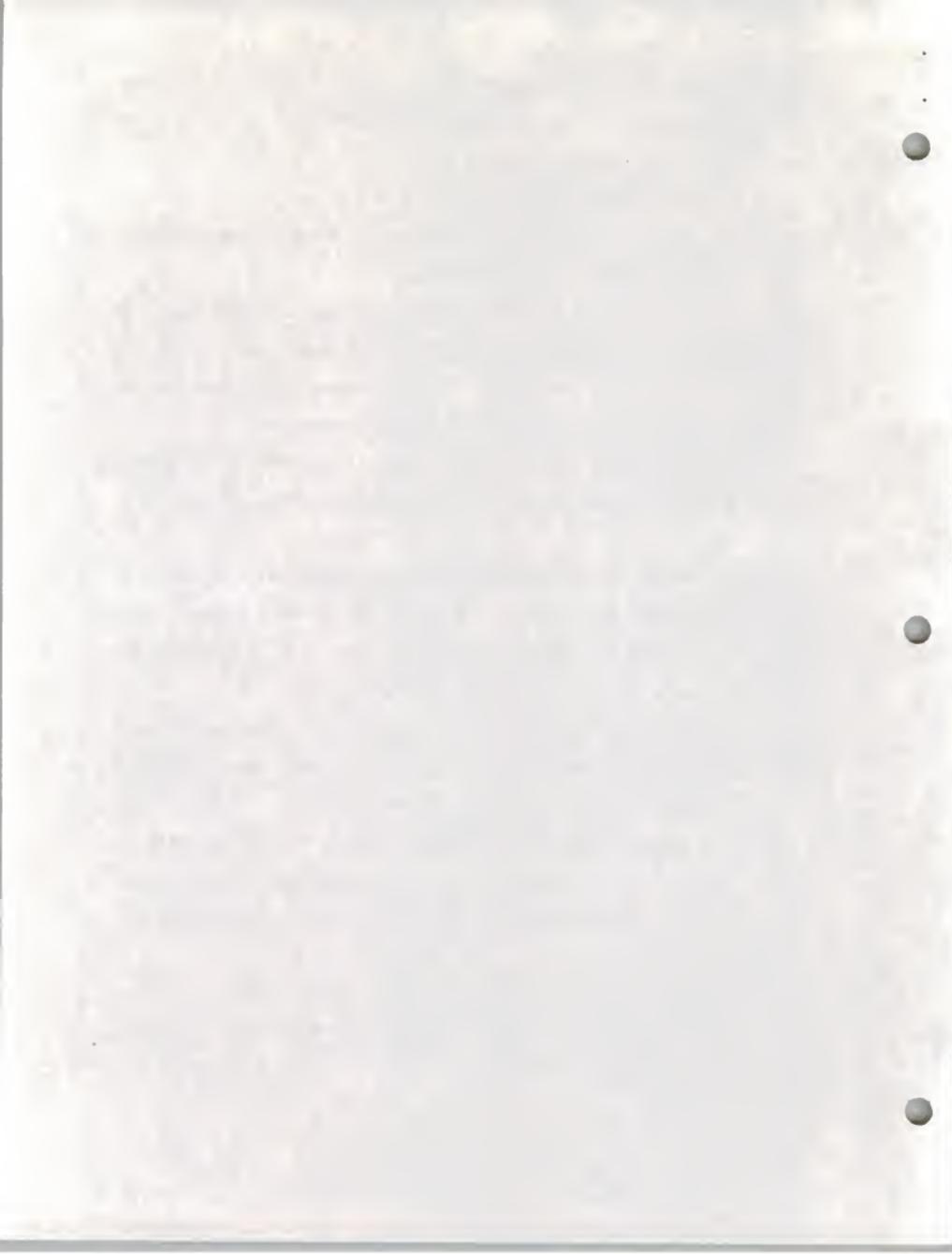
3. To expedite transfer of report information within each agency, it is recommended that the first individual obtaining the information contact the MDFWP directly.
4. Information to obtain and report should include as a minimum the following:
 - a. Name, address and telephone number of the observer (and person reporting);
 - b. Complete description of location of observation as well as geographical location (township, range, section);
 - c. Date and time of observation;



- d. Number of animals observed;
- e. Distance to animal(s) observed in feet;
- f. Length of time observed;
- g. Activity of animal(s);
- h. Distance to and size of nearest prairie dog community;
- i. Circumstances of observation.

5. One or more of the following individuals will evaluate the validity of the report: Arnold Dood, Dennis Flath, John Cada, Ron Crete, Tim Clark, and Tom Campbell. The report will be scored based on the following criteria:

- a. Adequacy of photograph. Likely ferret = 10 pts., Possible = 5 pts., and no picture or not ferret = 0 pts.;
- b. Location. On prairie dog town and other prairie dog towns within 3 mi. = 10 pts., On or near prairie dog town and no other towns within 3 mi. = 5 pts., No prairie dog towns in vicinity = 0 pts.;
- c. Distance of observation. Within 50 yards or 200 yds through 4+ power telescope = 10 pts., Within 50-100 yds or 200 to 400 yds through 4+ power scope = 5 pts., over 100 yds or 400+ yds. through 4+ power scope = 0 pts.
- d. Length of time observed. 5 or more min. = 10 pts., 30 seconds to 5 min. = 5 pts., less than 30 seconds = 0 pts.;
- e. Description of animal. mask = 5 pts., Size = 1 pts., Tail length and color = 1 pts., Body color = 1 pts., and Leg color = 2 pts.;

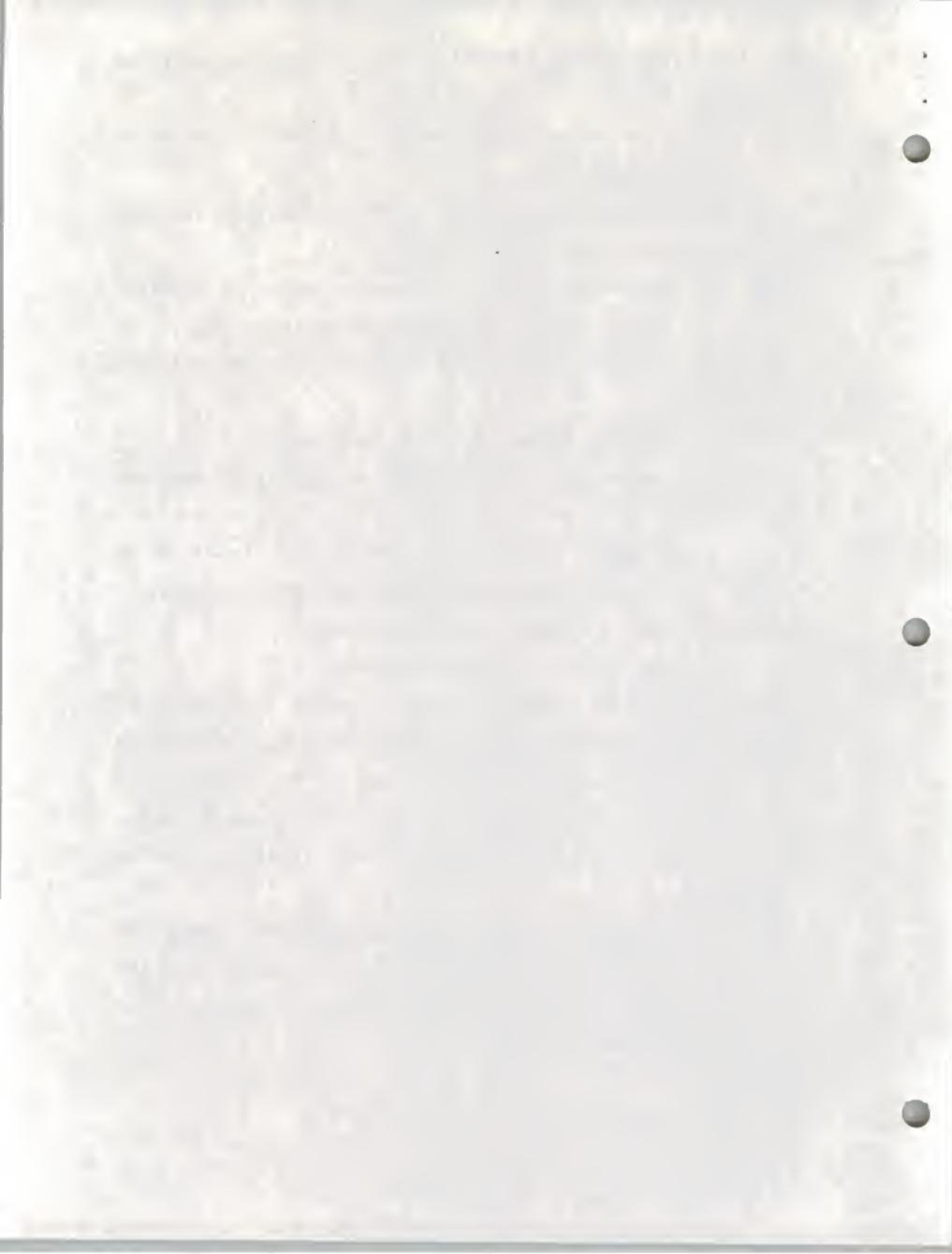


- f. Behavior (Bonus Points). 5 pts. if ferret behavior described;
- g. Observer Reliability (Bonus Points). 5 pts. if experienced observer.

The following categories would be determined base upon the above scoring system:

- a. Highly probable. 40-50 pts. with no zeros on any item.
Action: Follow up recommended without delay;
- b. Likely. 30-40 pts. with no zeros or 40-50 pts. with one zero.
Action: Follow up within seven days;
- c. Fair. 22-30 pts. with no zeros or 30-40 pts. with one zero.
Action: Follow up if convenient or if other reports have come from same vicinity;
- d. Unlikely. All other point categories.
Action: No action recommended.

- 7. If a follow up is planned, the USFWS, MDFWP, and Biota will be notified immediately and a decision made as to the follow up search procedure. If no follow up is planned, the information will be forwarded to the above parties by mail.
- 8. A follow up search in response to a report will be as follows:
 - a. One to three (maximum) of the involved researchers will contacted private landowners in the vicinity of the search and inform them of our desire to follow up and solicit their support;



- b. Up to four field biologists will begin prearranged surveys;
- c. The length of time spent in the area surveying will be dependent upon the judgement of the field researchers.

9. When a ferret sighting has been made, immediate confidentiality will be maintained and the following action will be taken:

- a. The USFWS will be notified, consulted, and impending procedure will be agreed upon;
- b. The landowner/lessee or public agency landowner will be contacted by MDFWP within 48 hours, if possible, to work out details of the follow up effort;
- c. A low-key assessment of the black-footed ferret population will be conducted by a minimum number of field biologists and will continue for approximately 90 days;
- d. After four to six days the cooperating agencies will be notified of the preliminary status of the sighting;
- e. Public meetings and news releases will be coordinated by the MDFWP in cooperation with MDA within 14 to 21 days after verification has been made;
- f. If a population of ferrets is found, meetings with affected landowners and cooperating agencies will be held to develop an interim management plan for each land ownership; and
- g. After 120 to 180 days a general plan with action goals for black-footed ferret conservation and recovery will be developed.

